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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000086

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [PINR](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: POST ELECTION UPDATES

REF: MASERU 81 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: June Carter Perry, Ambassador, EXEC , STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) While the 2007 national elections in Lesotho are over, the questions that remain post election are still lingering throughout the country and particularly in the capital city of Maseru. The overwhelming victory between Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) (61 national assembly seats -- all of which were derived from constituency representation) has become cause for concern for the new opposition, the All Basotho Convention (ABC) party particularly (with only 17 seats) and, despite the assurances of ABC leader Thomas Thabane, has already resulted in challenges in which at least one demonstration of chanting youths erupted on the evening of February 20. We understand a major ABC rally is expected on Sunday, February 25. One of the more inflammatory radio stations called "Harvest Radio" was taken off the air late February 20, and the manager, a South African national, was deported February 20/21 according to the South African High Commissioner. Further investigation into what actually happened in terms of the government role in this incident is still under investigation. Although the South African station manager was deported, he may return to challenge GOL charges that his license fees had not been paid. The GOL seems eager to move forward swiftly with inauguration of new members of Parliament and Prime Minister Mosisili and to provide security during opposition rallies February 23-25. End Summary.

MMP System Countdown

¶2. (C) The caution that had been put forward by the community team of observers that the method of mixed members proportional representation (MMP) could easily be manipulated by political parties. The count has sent numerous Lesotho political parties into ongoing debates about manipulation by the ruling LCD and the smaller National Independence Party (NIP), claiming that the NIP is serving as a decoy for the LCD. According to reliable sources, already a number of LCD ministers and parliamentary seats are now taking seats as members of the NIP; confirmed among these is the former Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment N'tsinyi, who also serves as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the ruling LCD party. As the specifics of former

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ministers who will take smaller seats becomes clearer, post will also advise. As this overall situation (i.e. the manipulation of the MMP) becomes clearer, we should be able to unearth the counter measures various smaller parties will take to both publicize their perception of the process and the legal actions they plan to take to contest the final results (septel). In conversation with BNP leader General Lekhanya on February 22, we learned he plans a joint opposition rally Sunday (2/25) with the ABC and a possible demonstration February 23, as well as taking legal action against the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

Prime Minister's Reactions

13. (C) Over a frank and friendly lunch hosted by the Ambassador at the CMR February 21, the international development partners reviewed their commitment to meeting with heads of the major political parties and confirmed meeting with General Lekhanya of the Basotho National Party on February 22. The South African High Commissioner (SAHC) used a previously scheduled appointment with the Prime Minister (PM) on February 20 to request, on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps, a brief meeting with him. Interestingly enough, two things came out of the South African's conversation with the PM. First, he was very hesitant to meet with the Diplomatic Corps saying he feared criticism of himself and his party. South African High Commissioner William Leslie replied that the purpose of the meeting would be to congratulate his party and to restate the interest of the international community in security so that the development of Lesotho could continue through the programs already established and those that are being developed. Upon hearing this comment, reportedly, the PM changed his mind and said that in that case he would be happy to receive the Chiefs of Mission. Secondly, surprisingly enough, the PM professed not to know about the shutdown of the Harvest FM Radio station, and he immediately called the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) to discuss this matter. (Comment: We would like to note here that in 2006 the Ambassador was able to secure the Article 98 Agreement with the U.S. during the absence of the Foreign Minister and through her own direct briefings on this matter with the Prime Minister. It is our sense that full

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disclosure by Ministers to the Head of Government certainly does not always take place as it should. End Comment.) The PM has volunteered that he does not always obtain full information from members of his current Cabinet on a number of issues.

14. (C) The PM is to be inaugurated on February 23 by the King and to appoint his Cabinet within days of that ceremony. During a February 21 press conference (septel), the PM responded to questions about the media shutdown, the MMP and the nation's future. He pointed to USG programs - The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) (once/if agreed) and AGOA - as a "boost" to Lesotho's economic development. The new members of the National Assembly are to elect their leader and deputy February 22 and convene after the PM names his new Cabinet.

Comment

15. (C) The combination of the overwhelming victory by the LCD, questions about the implementation of the MMP system and uncertainty about the media house that faced closure problems and the pending major opposition rally this weekend, could, if not fully addressed, lead to a controversy on a variety of fronts.

16. (C) In the security area, the GOL appears eager to end the "vacuum" that currently exists by prompt swearing-in ceremonies. The Ambassador was informed several months ago of the coming Cabinet shuffle by the Ministers of Finance and of Foreign Affairs. With the ruling LCD's ministerial losses in many constituencies, the make-up of the new Cabinet is highly anticipated. We do wish to emphasize that the small 50-100 ABC

youth gathering that took place on February 20 was handled very professionally by the police without any negative consequences. The Ambassador also spoke late February 20 with the Deputy Prime Minister (who also serves as Minister of Home Affairs and Security) and during that conversation, he said that all security offices are under orders to maintain stability throughout the city and throughout the country. Post will continue to track all of the above issues carefully and to take security precautions as needed. End Comment
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